



New Haven/León Sister City Project

Summer 2016 Newsletter

Shared Struggle

By Margaret Moor

On my second day in Nicaragua, I found myself in the back of a pickup truck traveling on a dirt road headed for the rural village of Goyena. My belly still full from the enormous *huevos*, *queso* and *gallo pinto* breakfast I had enjoyed with my host family, and the equally massive *pollo*, *arroz* and *plátano* lunch I consumed not four hours later, I sat nervously thinking about what I was about to do. Erendira Vanegas, the NHLSCP Domestic Violence Prevention Program coordinator, would be giving a lecture to the Goyenan women's group, and I was to then lead the women in a closing activity of my own design. I couldn't get it out of my head that I was an outsider here in the Central American countryside, self-conscious of my insufficient Spanish skills after just two years of classes at Yale, and unsure of how I would be able to connect with women from such different walks of life.

We gathered on the cement porch of the NHLSCP Goyena office, and while some women breastfed their newborns and others whispered to their older children to stay silent and behave, Erendira began a discussion about what society defines as an ideal wife. The women described someone who was wholly submissive to her husband, and Erendira guided the women into realizing that if they themselves would never want to be that woman, how could they possibly hold others to that standard? She explained that these expectations perpetuate the cycle of inequality and

female powerlessness that the women had pledged to defeat.

After nearly an hour and a half, it was my turn. In a broken series of unconjugated verbs, I nervously tried to explain the game I had devised: Human Knot, where you stand in a circle, lock hands with people across from you and try to untangle yourselves without letting go. While it took a few tries for everyone to understand, soon we were all laughing as we were forced to jump over arms, crawl through legs and twist in ridiculous positions to accomplish our goal.

While I reveled in this moment of community on the drive back to León, Erendira expressed to me her frustration that the group struggles to engage with one another on the topics discussed each week. Each of the women have undergone their own struggles with the patriarchal society in Nicaragua, like the expectation of being a passive wife, yet are reluctant to share their experiences and connect them to the theory she lectures on. Her goal was for the women's group to be a close-knit community where women can lean on one another for support as they all fight against a common enemy: machismo.

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Mural above: Environmental theme mural in Esteli, Nicaragua.

Inspired by Erendira's dedication and passion for the women's groups, I decided to spend my summer trying to fulfill that dream of creating a safe space for open, personal discussion. Using my training as a peer counselor and discussion leader, I crafted and presented a series of six workshops

(in my then much-improved Spanish) to the two NHLSCP women's empowerment groups in Goyena and Troilo, with the goal of beginning a discussion of participants' personal experiences of gender violence and oppression.

But even as I led weekly discussions on self-esteem and emotions, and created activities to prompt sharing, some part of me still felt detached from the groups. I was worried that because I

would be present for only two months, the women would not feel comfortable enough to share their more personal stories with me. It wasn't until my fourth week with the group in Troilo that I realized I had it all wrong.

The workshop centered on an activity in which we shared

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Margaret and women do trust-building exercise.

In the Margins of Society

By Tabitha Sookdeo

It is always encouraging to see people speaking up for those without a voice. Some friends from college drove up to the Republican National Convention in Cleveland to protest and call for respect for undocumented immigrants. It is a population that is often dehumanized, and the roots of this migration are often ignored.

Today in many communities in Latin America, young adults flee to America, while the older generation suffers from sickness and starvation. In Mexico, corn was a fundamental crop that farmers planted and now there are now acres and acres of land that lay barren. Agriculture was the way of life for many Mexicans. With the passage of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement in 1994, which promoted imports from the United States, two million agricultural jobs were lost there. The Mexican people were promised cheaper food, and a lesser need for migration, but now more than 20 million Mexicans suffer from hunger.

The loss of rural jobs and farms, along with environmental degradation, have also caused the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas. This is partly due to the lack of government funding for the development of rural areas. This unsustainable influx of people to crowded urban areas is leading to an increase of homelessness, human trafficking, pollution and violence.

High unemployment has triggered unrest across Mexico and Central America, and is worsened by government corruption and impunity. Intense gang violence and other social injustices have led unaccompanied minors to flee across the US border.

It's striking that the majority American opinion calls these children "illegal aliens," as opposed to "children fleeing violence." Clearly, this is more of a human rights refugee crisis than an immigration one.

Once here, refugees and immigrants face new challenges. According to farm worker activists in Florida, children and adults can become modern day wage slaves. One of the poorest communities in Florida is Immokalee. There tomato farms dominate and it is one the biggest agricultural industries in the United States. Wages there have been stagnant since 1978, and it takes picking 2.25 tons of tomatoes per day for a migrant farmworker to make the Floridian minimum wage of \$8.05. Also, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers discovered that there were cases of migrant workers being held against their will—shackled in trailers. In 2008, a company was accused of holding, beating, and stealing from workers.

There is a disgusting correlation with slavery in the field and the food that we all eat. Between 1997-2010, there were nine major court cases that were won on the basis on human rights violations (For more information on the court cases: <http://www.ciw-online.org/slavery/>). We ought to pay more attention to who we buy food from and the condition of the workers who produce it.

The recent xenophobic rhetoric in the US political arena has stirred public fear of immigration and have made it a partisan issue. Many don't realize that undocumented immigrants pay an enormous amount



Margaret Moor participating in Domestic Violence Prevention Program activity.

Shared Struggle

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moments of feeling intense emotions. Starting off with love, various women spoke about the first moment they looked into the eyes of their newborn child. After some time, we transitioned into sharing times of sadness, where the death of loved ones was a prominent theme. Finally, we landed upon fear. After a few breaths of silence, one woman, probably around 40 years old, opened up. She revealed, tears forming in her eyes, that her greatest fear was that her second husband would turn out to be just like her first: abusive. While she loved and trusted him, some part of her was terrified every day that she would come

home to find him unexplainably past his breaking point, hitting her just as her previous husband had.

When she finished, we all, through our own teary eyes, chanted, "Thank you for sharing." She looked up at me and held my gaze before exhaling and smiling, relief spreading across her face. Her greatest fear was now known by twenty other women who would

all work to ensure it never became a reality. In that moment, I realized that I was the only one preoccupied with myself being an "outsider." Everyone else had accepted me into the group from the moment I sat down.

I may be from a different country, and we may have many different experiences, but I too am a woman. And as a woman, I now carry part of each of the experiences of the other women with me. Isabel, the group's community leader, then turned to me and said, "We have much sadness. We have much fear." But at least now, we don't have to deal with it alone.

Margaret is a junior at Yale and also jumped in to help organize a March fundraising campaign for the women's program.

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Investing in Early Childhood Education: A must for Latin American Countries

By Laura Leon

We head into Goyena to visit the preschool. I'm excited to see the children and meet the teachers. But it's the summer season in Goyena. Heavy rain pours at night creating mud from the dirt streets. The rain fills up the river separating Goyena into two. Humidity levels rise with the summer heat. I underestimate the power of the weather and the impact it has on the rural community of Goyena. We finally arrive to the preschool and step inside the classroom only to find four children. The rest could not make it to school. They could not make the walk across the river and muddy streets, they are only children. Yet, with every day they miss, they fall behind on critical lessons.

Early childhood programs are valuable to education systems in Latin America and across the world. They provide necessary motor, cognitive, socio-emotional, and communication skills that are difficult to teach once a child has outgrown a developmental stage. Therefore, when a child misses a day of preschool they fall behind in the full development of their growth. Studies have shown that early childhood programs make the difference between success and failure. For rural communities like Goyena, preschool programs are necessary to uplift families from poverty.

After we walk in, we sit across from the children and observe the activity. They are learning about horizontal and vertical lines. The teacher discusses the differences between both types of lines and passes out a worksheet. The kids trace the lines of the drawing noting which is vertical and horizontal. I admire the teacher's work and how she talks with children. She listens to

what they have to say and respects their voice and opinion. Once she sees the children are able to work independently, she walks over and discusses her frustrations.

First, she is not paid enough. Even though she has a teaching certificate, it does not guarantee her a livable wage. She receives no support from the government like teacher training or funding for classroom materials. Even before she became a teacher, the journey towards the profession was a challenge. This teacher is not alone. In Nicaragua and Latin America early childhood educators are the most important educators in a child's life yet are paid the least. The work these educators do is unlike other teaching professions. They must understand a child's mind, observe their development, and still manage to teach the appropriate curriculum. Even in countries like the United States early childhood teachers are not respected as a profession. Early childhood education faces a battle with governments for necessary funding and support.

Due to the lack of governmental support, many children in Latin America live without the benefits of high quality early childhood programs. Besides providing life-long skills, early childhood education programs teach children about hygiene, health and nutrition. Hygienic skills like hand-washing and proper sneezing benefit the whole family. These skills then continue to benefit the entire community and create healthier habits. Nutrition is another issue families in impoverished communities face. Poverty in rural communities prevent families from buying healthy

foods that are usually expensive. Therefore, food provided by preschool programs give children the much needed nutrients they cannot receive at home. Parents across the globe rely on early childhood programs to feed their children with nutrient dense foods to stimulate their growth.

Even though early childhood programs are extremely beneficial to communities they are still inaccessible to many children. There are not enough preschools that are free and geographically near to the communities that need it the most in Latin America. While there are existing programs, quality is another question preschools must answer. Creating high quality programs are a challenge in itself because a program of high quality must take a whole child approach. The whole child approach focuses on the child and the family, but working with families can be difficult. In Goyena, the teachers note that asking parents to help their children with homework is a challenge. With low literacy rates among the adults, many parents cannot take on the task of helping their child.



Laura with a kinderstart class in San Diego.

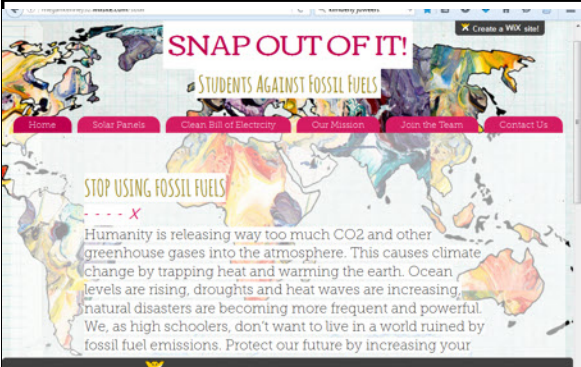
Latin American countries need to create affordable and accessible early childhood programs. Ensuring affordability begins with demanding legislation that will allocate appropriate funds to early childhood programs. Additionally, governments need to formulate how to measure the quality of programs. Quality and accessibility go hand in hand. Without early childhood programs put into place we will continue to see issues like poverty and illiteracy plaguing communities in Latin America.

Laura Leon is a rising junior at Yale and organized teacher trainings this summer.

Interns Everywhere!!

This summer NHLSCP has had ten interns and volunteers working out of the New Haven office on a number of projects, including marketing and planning for the goNewHavenGo CarFree Month in September, Healthy City/Healthy Climate Challenge outreach to organizations, public health communications research, public art creation, a new high school student led clean energy project (website screen shot below), a Bhangra climate dance (see below), and other climate change outreach.

We are VERY appreciative of the time and creativity given by Sana Charania, Tabitha Sookdeo, Sarah McDonald, Seema Patel, Poonam Sidhu, Calla Cameron, Karl Meakin, Abigail Eswar, Bonnie Buis, and Sarah Beth Watson (partial group photo below).

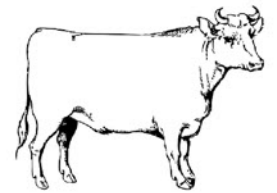


Beef Free Campaign Launched

New Haven Healthy City/Healthy Climate Challenge is starting a campaign to educate people about the grave environmental and health impacts of beef and inspire them to reduce the ecological footprint of their diet. The hope is that people will be open to this step which has significant positive climate change impacts. Below is a poster that HCC is using and right is a bike cart sign intern Pam Torola was showing off at Rock to Rock Earth Day Ride in April. Lots of great info and tips at healthyclimatechallenge.org.



WHAT'S the BEEF



Health



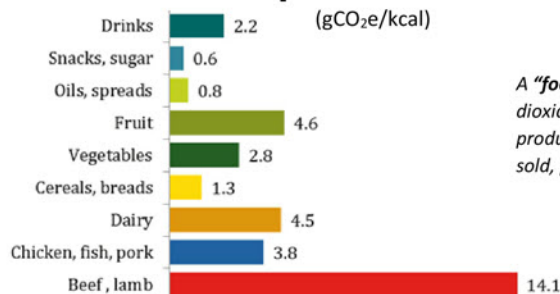
- ♥ Red meat is high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and calories. Eating beef increases risk of **diabetes**, **cardiovascular disease**, and **cancer**.
- ♥ Beef production contributes to **antibiotic resistance**. Eating beef exposes you to pharmaceutical residues and **stress hormones**.

Environment

Compared to eggs, dairy, pork, and chicken, beef production involves:

- 28** times the **land** for growing feed crops, causing loss of habitats and biodiversity
- 6** times the reactive **nitrogen** pollution from fertilizers and manure
- 11** times the **irrigation water** for growing cattle feed
- 5** times the **greenhouse gas** pollution

Carbon "Foodprints"



A "foodprint" is carbon dioxide emissions from production until being sold, per kilocalorie.

Sources: ERS/USDA, LCA data, IO-LCA data, Weber & Matthews
ADAPTED FROM SHRINKTHATFOOTPRINT.COM



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of state and federal taxes. According to the Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy, 8.1 million of 11.4 million undocumented immigrants paid \$11.8 billion in taxes. Although undocumented immigrants pay taxes, healthcare is unreachable, even for undocumented children. Additionally, they do not qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, in state tuition in the majority of the states, and federal scholarships. Also, students cannot go to college easily. Thus continues a cycle of poverty due to a lack of education.

Children who are undocumented, or who grow up with undocumented parents, can face grave psychological anxiety. They grow up in constant fear and some develop

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, worrying about the safety of their families. Many are forced to grow up too quickly, think that they should not enjoy their childhood, and feel guilty about being undocumented.

Some families see domestic violence in the home. Undocumented women have a higher probability of being victims of battery and sexual assault. In confronting the violence there is uncertainty how to handle these violent situations as the opportunity to report crimes to the police is not always available.

With increasing popular media attention to immigration, it appears that people are more

interested in the issue than ever. Yet these remain surface level interactions as human interaction on a deeper level seems to be decreasing. So it's becoming increasingly difficult to have empathy for those around us, and especially for those who are different. We have become attracted to the *concept* of social justice, instead of actually working towards solutions.



But we need to pay attention to those in the margins. Undocumented immigrants feel that they are lesser in society because of how they are treated. If we are silent while the media slanders undocumented immigrants as less human, then we are accepting that they are less deserving of respect.

We can join with others, like my friends in Cleveland and others across the country have done, and speak up to those in power to say we will not accept the degradation of other human beings. And we can also participate in the struggle to end the US economic and trade policies that help drive immigration in Latin America in the first place.

Tabitha Sookdeo is a rising senior at Trevecca Nazarene University studying social justice and environmental science.



Delegation and community members showing off their newly painted mural on the NHLSCP office in Nueva Vida and above at visit to women's organization in Matagalpa.

Women's Rights Delegation

In late July five women traveled to Leon to learn about women's struggles against violence and to support projects there.

Megan Fountain, who led the group, writes, "The visits to women's organizations in Matagalpa, Esteli, Ciudad Sandino and Malpaisillo gave all of us an idea of what is possible. The days we spent in Troilo gave us an idea of how much violence is there and how little power many of the women have. At the same time, Erendira, Nubia, Isabel, Maria and Teresa have made great strides getting the women to open up and break the silence.


We're bringing back some organic jam, coffee and jamaica flower tea that is grown, processed and commercialized by an association of eight women cooperatives in Esteli. These women were an incredible inspiration for us and for Isabel and Maria of Troilo, who journeyed with us to Esteli and Matagalpa.

The leader of the cooperatives is over 65 years old, and she just completed her high school diploma through her association's literacy program, and now she is earning a university degree in natural medicine."

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*NH/LSCP supports education
and sustainable development in
Nicaragua and New Haven.*

Paper: Environment PC 100. 
Post consumer 100%

BikesWork Raffle to support public health
and climate work of New Haven Leon SCP. Drawing
date: **November 1, 2016.** Need not be present to
win.



Prizes Xtracycle Leap
Basic Kit ("create dream
cargo and hauling
machine") plus Home
Depot \$25 off coupon
(\$600 value);
Citizen Tokyo

Folding Bike; Ortlieb Bike Shopper Panniers plus
\$50 Stop and Shop gift car; Amity Bikes prize
pack (gift card, light, bottle... \$70 value)



**Get your tickets now from NHLSCP members
and friends.**